



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE HONOR SYSTEM IN AMERICAN COLLEGES

Professor Bird T. Baldwin's dissertation on the "Honor System" in the *Journal of Educational Psychology* for January, 1914, published at Baltimore, Maryland, affords interesting reading. It appears necessary to understand the question, Dr. Baldwin seems to make the Honor System identical with "student direction and student control in examinations," and, after referring to the claims of William and Mary College and South Carolina College, as of much earlier date, gives the University of Virginia the credit of "first definitely fixing the date of the formal adoption of the organized system as a system." In this he refers to the action of the University Board in 1842 of requiring a pledge to the examination papers.

If by all this Dr. Baldwin intended to define the system of honor as a mere rule established for the examination room, it is not the Honor System I was acquainted with at the University when a student there from 1870 to 1876. The "system of honor" which we heard talked of was a spirit, not a rule or set of rules. It had relation to the behavior of the student considered as a gentleman of dignity and standing. It covered his whole conduct. We, as students, were not to be spied upon, we were not to be harassed by petty rules and regulations and our word was to be taken without question. Lying, cheating, stealing and hazing were proscribed by this code, and it made no difference whether they were committed in the examination room or out of it. We never regarded the pledge attached to the examination papers—that "we had neither given nor received assistance from the beginning to the end of this examination"—other than as a formal acknowledgement of our obligation to act as gentlemen.

This being the case, the priority regarding the Honor System as between William and Mary College and the University of Virginia is easily determined. The fact is that from the beginning of the University in 1824 to the year 1842, at least, the Board of Visitors of the University did not recognize the splendid

code of honor which distinguished the institution in after days. As shown by the official minutes, the laws of the University during these eighteen years were almost those of a reformatory institution, and regulated every particular of dress, table fare, and student behavior. The result was that the Virginia youth resented this treatment, and the history of the University was for years one of open rebellion and lawlessness.

Now then, what was the discipline at William and Mary College during this early period when the espionage system prevailed at the University? So far was it from being like that at the University, that the President, John Augustine Smith, in a report in 1826, referred to the University regulations as a system "no one is willing to adopt here." But what was the system at William and Mary? Why, if we can trust Judge Nathaniel Beverley Tucker in his address to his Law Class in 1834, it was in every respect like the noble code of honor which prevailed at the University from 1870 to 1876, and of which the present writer can personally speak, being a student there at the time. Here is a passage from Judge Tucker's address in 1834:

"If there be anything by which the University of William and Mary has been advantageously distinguished, it is the liberal and magnanimous character of its discipline. It has been the study of its professors to cultivate at the same time the intellect, the principles, and the deportment of the student, laboring with equal diligence to infuse the spirit of the scholar and the spirit of the gentleman. He comes to us as a gentleman. As such we receive and treat him, and resolutely refuse to know him in any other character. He is not harassed with petty regulations; he is not insulted and annoyed by impertinent surveillance. Spies and informers have no countenance among us. We receive no accusations but from the conscience of the accused. His honor is the only witness to which we appeal; and should be even capable of prevarication as falsehood, we admit no proof of the fact."

To this he added the following sentence:

"The effect of this system in inspiring a high and scrupulous sense of honor, and a scorn of all disingenuous artifice, has been

ascertained by *long experience*, and redounds to the praise of its authors."

In 1847, thirteen years later, Judge Tucker emphasized these views. In his address to his Law Class he spoke of the College as a "School of Honor"—as establishing "a system altogether her own," as "taking the lead in that great experiment in the discipline of the youthful mind, which substitutes candid appeals to the better feelings of the pupil, and frank reliance on his honor for espionage, severity and the restraints of the cloister," and "as keeping in advance of all the rest" of the colleges in this respect. (See WILLIAM AND MARY QUARTERLY MAGAZINE, XVIII., 165-171.) Judge N. B. Tucker was brother of Henry St. George Tucker, author of the University resolution of 1842; both of them had been students of William and Mary College in 1799, and both had been trained in the William and Mary "School of Honor."

Judge Tucker in his address in 1834 referred to the system at William and Mary as one of "long continuance." When did it, therefore, originate? Certainly before 1799 when the Tuckers were students. I have been inclined to consider the time as about 1779, when Mr. Jefferson, as Governor, living in Williamsburg, reorganized the curriculum, when the Grammar School for boys was abolished, when the chairs of Law and Medicine were established, and when the college had in its attendance several Revolutionary officers, such as Captain John Marshall, afterwards Chief Justice, and Captain William Pierce, who distinguished himself at "Eutaw Springs." The conditions must have been much like those I remember at the University from 1870 to 1876, when that institution numbered on its rolls a number of men who had served in the Confederate army, and who would, of course, have resented any attempt to treat them as children.

It was not long after 1779—to be exact, in 1784—that a written pledge was, for the first time, required by the William and Mary authorities of the matriculates to observe the college regulations, and to "pursue that kind of conduct which they shall think conducive to the honor and prosperity of the institution." So in the published code of rules of 1817, students were to be

examined on "honor" in cases of dereliction; and in 1830 an elaborate statute was passed wherein it was stated that "if any student denied on his honor an offence," such denial should be taken as "conclusive evidence" of his innocence, because, as was asserted, "the convention (that is, the Board of Visitors) is satisfied that no student will degrade himself by a falsehood, and that an appeal to his honor will never be made in vain."

In his address in 1847, previously referred to, we are further assured by Judge Tucker that "to the student's own sense of duty and interest fortified by his plighted word" was committed "the entire enforcement of the scanty but important code of rules at William and Mary," and he says that "the experiments succeeded so well that the example to a certain extent had been everywhere followed."

Let us not deceive any one. Judge Tucker's words must not be understood as meaning that the Honor System cured all the troubles of college discipline. On the contrary the students were very wild at times, and cases of disorder and intoxication were by no means infrequent. But these minutes of the college proceedings are conspicuously free from recording any instances of the baser defects of human character—lying, cheating, stealing or hazing, on the part of the students; and we fail to find any evidence of espionage, on the part of the Faculty.